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X-MEN

FEB '97 106



EXCALIBUR

**INNER
DEMONS**

**-- EXTERNAL
THREATS!**

DIRECT EDITION



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\$1.95 US \$2.75 CAN

**I'M THE FIRESTARTER...TWISTED FIRESTARTER...
I'M THE SELF-INFLICTED...TWISTED...**

PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH
RASPUTIN IS THE LAST
IN HIS FAMILY'S LINEAGE.

HIS PARENTS -- NIKOLAI
AND ALEXANDER -- WERE
MURDERED BY AGENTS OF
THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT. ®

HIS OLDER BROTHER AND FORMER SOVIET
COSMONAUT -- MIKHAIL -- HAS SINCE
EXHIBITED REALITY
WARPING MUTANT
ABILITIES AND A
PENCHANT FOR EVIL.

FOR ALL PIOTR KNOWS,
HIS ONE-TIME HERO --
WHO HAS SINCE BECOME
THE INSANE RULER OF AN
EXTRADIMENSIONAL WORLD
POPULATED BY MUTANTS --
IS LIKELY DEAD. ®

AND HIS BABY SISTER --
HIS PRECIOUS "LITTLE
SNOWFLAKE", ILYANA --
THOUGH BUT A CHILD...

... WAS COUNTED AMONG
THE FIRST CASUALTIES TO
FALL IN WHAT HAS SINCE
BECOME AN UPHILL BATTLE
AGAINST THE MERCILESS
LEGACY VIRUS. ®

SUFFICE IT TO SAY,
HIS LIFE HAS NOT
BEEN EASY...

STAN LEE
PRESENTS:
A TURNING POINT
IN THE LIFE OF
COLOSSUS!

BEN
SAB
NOTES

CAST
JOHN
HARRIS
JAMES
AARON
JENNIFER
REYNOLDS

ARIANE
LENGHOF
COLORIST
MALCOLM
FISCH

MARTIN
HARRIS
KEITH
PINNICK
LORETT
JONAS
KEE

EDWARD
ITZEL
A
LAWYER
JETTAKI

DANNY
DOLIN
EDITOR
HARRAL
FREE

A
PORTRAIT
OF
THE
ARTIST

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"FIRESTARTER" BY THE PRODUCE
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© LIRICAL BY NICK SPYGLASS



THE DAY HE LEFT THE
UST-ORDINSKI COLLECTIVE
AND EMIGRATED TO THE
UNITED STATES AT THE
BEHEST OF PROFESSOR
CHARLES FRANCIS XAVIER...

...TO BECOME A MEMBER
OF THE OUTLAW BAND OF
MUTANT HEROES KNOWN
AS THE X-MEN...



... PIOTR VOWED TO DO
WHAT HE BELIEVED WAS
BEST FOR HIMSELF AND
HIS LOVED ONES...

BUT WHEN THOSE
DEAREST TO HIS
HEART WERE
TRAGICALLY TAKEN
FROM HIM...



... AND ALL THAT
REMAINED WAS A
WORLD HATING
AND FEARING HIM
FOR HIS GENETIC
DIFFERENCE...

... A PART OF PIOTR
RASPUTIN DIED A GRIM,
VIOLENT DEATH, AND
HIS VOW HIS
PERSONAL OATH...



... BECAME A BURDEN
GREATER THAN EVEN
THIS STALWART YOUNG
MAN COULD BEAR.



SIDING WITH THE X-MEN'S
GREATEST NEMESIS -- THE
INFAMOUS "MASTER OF
MAGNETISM", MAGNETO --
AS ONE OF HIS LOYAL
"ACOLYTES"...

... HE HOPED TO ASSUAGE
THE GUILT GNAWING AT HIS
CONSCIENCE BY TAKING A
MORE AGGRESSIVE APPROACH
AT SOLVING THE HUMAN/
MUTANT POLEMIC.



INSTEAD, THE MUTANT
KNOWN AS COLOSSUS
NOT ONLY MANAGED
TO CUT HIMSELF OFF
FROM ALL HIS FRIENDS...

... BUT HE NEARLY
BECAME THAT WHICH HE
HAD PLEDGED HIS LIFE
TO DEFEND AGAINST.



NOW, WITH THE
INTERNATIONAL
BAND OF HEROES
KNOWN GLOBALLY
AS EXCALIBUR...



... PIOTR IS ONCE
MORE TRYING TO
MAKE AMENDS TO
THAT SOMEHOW,
SOMEDAY...



... THE RASPUTIN FAMILY
HERITAGE NEED NOT END
WITH HIM.

CAN I LOOK,
PIOTR? CAN
I LOOK?

PLEASE/
PLEASE! PLEASE/
CAN I?

NYET,
MEGGAN --
NOT JUST
YET.

I
MUST BEG YOUR
INDULGENCE --

-- AND
ASK YOU
TO USE YOUR
ELEMENTAL
POWERS TO
HOVER
STILL --

-- FOR BUT
ANOTHER
FEW, BRIEF
MOMENTS.

I AM
TRYING
SOMETHING...
JUST A BIT...
DIFFERENT
WITH THIS
PIECE.

IT HAS
BEEN SUCH
A LONG TIME
SINCE I'VE EVEN
TOUCHED A
CANVAS...

...I
WANTED --
I NEEDED --
TO
SEE HOW I'VE
CHANGED.

AND
THIS LITTLE
SURPRISE YOU'VE
ASKED ME TO HELP
YOU PREPARE FOR
BRIAN IS THE
PERFECT --

-- HOW
WOULD DR.
MORTAGGERT
PUT IT? Ah,
YES... "LITMUS
TEST" --

-- FOR MY
MATURATION,
BOTH ARTISTICALLY
AND
PERSONALLY.

JUST...
ONE... MORE...
SMUDGE... AND
THREEEN --

-- DR! IT IS
FINISHED!

ALL
RIGHT,
MEGGAN --
NOW YOU MAY
LOOK.





JUST
REMEMBER,
"TOVARRISCH" --
THIS IS OUR
LITTLE SECRET,
RIGHT?



DR,
MEG -- MAGNETO
HIMSELF COULD NOT
PRY IT FROM MY
ARMORED
LIPS!

BRIAN
BRADDOCK
IS A LUCKY MAN
TO HAVE SOME-
ONE WHO LOVES
HIM SO...



BAMF

WHAT'S
THIS I HEAR
ABOUT A
"SECRET," MEIN
KOMRADE?

IS
THERE
SOMETHING
GOING ON THAT YOUR
SWASHBUCKLING
TEAM LEADER
SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT?



ONLY THAT
UNLIKE FINE
WINE, FRIEND
KURT --

-- THE
BRIMSTONE
STENCH OF YOUR
TELEPORT DOES
NOT IMPROVE
WITH AGE ..

I'M
SORRY YOU
THINK SO,
PIOTR...



BAMF

... BECAUSE
YOU'RE ABOUT
TO GET A NOSE
FULL OF IT!

BAM!

NEXT
TIME YOU
WANT ME TO
JOIN YOU IN THE
LAB, NIGHT
CRAWLER, I

CALL
FIRST.

I WILL
TAKE IT UNDER
ADVISEMENT.

WHAT'S
THE WORD,
BRIAN?

THE
'WORD', MATE,
IS THIS...

... SOMEONE'S
REACTIVATED THE
MAINFRAME AT YOUR
OLD 'HOLE IN THE
GROUND' IN
AUSTRALIA,
POTR.

A
PROTOTYPE
SATELLITE I
DESIGNED TRACKED
THE SIGNAL DURING
AN ORBITAL TEST
RUN.

IT
SEEMS YOUR
OLD CHUMS,
THE ACOLYTES,
ARE BACK IN
BUSINESS.

THEY'VE SENT
A MESSAGE.



HELLO,
RASPUTIN --
LONG TIME,
NO SEE.

DON'T
KNOW IF
YOU MADE IT
TO EARTH
SAFELY --

-- BUT I
FIGURED THAT
ARMORED HIDE
WOULD'VE TIPPED
THE SCALES
IN YOUR
FAVOR.

YOU
WERE ALWAYS
THE STRONG
ONE.

ANYWAY...
HERE'S THE
DEAL. THE FLOCK
HAS BEEN GATHERED
TO RAISE AVALON
AGAIN.

NOW,
MORE THAN
EVER --

-- WE
ACOLYTES
NEED YOUR
STRENGTH.

SEE THE RECENT
MAGNETIC MATT
SERIES
MAGNETIC MATT



"RECONSTRUCTION"?
I THOUGHT AVALON
WAS DESTROYED BY
NOLOCRUST?!

UNFORTUNATELY, HE
DIDN'T DO A TERRIBLY
GOOD JOB
OF IT.

THE
STATION
FRAGMENTED
INTO MANY LARGE
SALVAGEABLE
CHUNKS.

IT IS
POSSIBLE
THAT *CARGILL*
AND THE MORE
INDUSTRIOUS
ACOLYTES HAVE
GATHERED
SOME.

BUT
WHO COULD HAVE
COORDINATED SUCH
AN ORGANIZED
EFFORT?

THERE
CAN ONLY
BE ONE
MAN --

EXODUS!

IF THERE
IS A BEING ALIVE
CHARISMATIC ENOUGH
TO WIN THE HEARTS AND
MINDS OF MY FORMER
COMRADES --

-- WHETHER
BY *PHYSICAL*
COERCION
OR *PSIDIC*
CONTROL --

-- IT
IS HE.



WE
MUST DISCERN
WHAT SCHEME HE
PLANS TO LOOSE
ON THE WORLD,
COMRADES.

AND TO
DO SO -- I
MUST CONFRONT
THE VERY PEOPLE I
HAVE TRIED SO HARD
TO DISTANCE
MYSELF
FROM...

... I
MUST FACE THE
ACOLYTES.

MEANWHILE, ON
THE NORTH
SHORE OF THE ISLAND.

"MY DEAREST
CHARLES...

"NOE
MATTER HOW
HARD I TRY OTHER-
WISE, I CANNOT STOP
THINKING ABOUT
JOE.

"THE
DAY HE DIED, I
FELT AN ENORMOUS
WEIGHT HAD BEEN
LIFTED FROM MUH
SHOULDERS.

"I
WAS FREE OF
THE HEARTACHES AND
CONSTANT BICKERING
AND THE PAIN O' KNOWING
MUH HUSBAND -- THE MAN
I LOVED -- WAS AN
OUT AND OUT
'BAM'.

"AND
THEN I THINK
ABOUT OUR BOY --
MUH WEE KEVIN -- THE
CHILD JOE AND I BOTH
FAILED -- AND I CANNOT
HELP BUT MISS
THAT OL'
'SLAG'.

"I ALWAYS
KNEW THAT TIME
AND DISTANCE CAN
CHANGE YUIR
PERSPECTIVE
ON THINGS --

"-- GIVE A
PERSON 20/20
HINDSIGHT
AN' ALL --

"-- BUT I
NEVER REALIZED
HOW MUCH FOCUS
PROXIMITY CAN
PROVIDE.

KEVIN A.K.A. PROTEUS
WAS FELLED IN UNCAIN
20-YEAR 100% MATT

"I WONDER
WILL THEY WELCOME
ME WHEN I SEE THEM
AGAIN..?"

MY DEAREST CHARLES,
NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY OTHERWISE, I CANNOT
STOP THINKING ABOUT JOE. THE DAY HE DIED, I FELT
AN ENORMOUS WEIGHT HAD BEEN LIFTED FROM MUH
SHOULDERS. I WAS FREE OF THE HEARTACHES AND
CONSTANT BICKERING AND THE PAIN OF KNOWING
MUH HUSBAND -- THE MAN I LOVED -- WAS AN OUT AND
OUT 'BAM'.

AND THEN I THINK ABOUT OUR BOY -- MUH WEE
KEVIN -- THE CHILD JOE AND I BOTH FAILED -- AND
I CANNOT HELP BUT MISS THAT OL' 'SLAG'.

I ALWAYS KNEW THAT TIME AND DISTANCE CAN
CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THINGS -- GIVE A
PERSON 20/20 HINDSIGHT AND ALL -- BUT I NEVER
REALIZED HOW MUCH FOCUS PROXIMITY CAN PROVIDE
I WONDER, WILL THEY WELCOME ME WHEN I SEE THEM
AGAIN..?

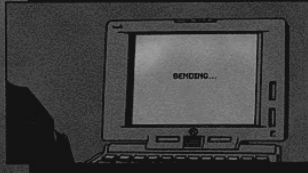


THOUGH I DOUBT THE GOVERNMENT'S GOIN' TAE LET CHARLES CHECK HIS E-MAIL --

-- AT LEAST THIS MESSAGE'LL BE WAITIN' WHEN HE GETS BACK.



I ONLY HOPE I WILL TOO...



SENDING...



ERROR!
THAT MAILBOX IS NO LONGER AVAILABLE.
YOUR E-MAIL HAS BEEN DELETED...

WHY, YE STUPID BLEEDIN'... GAAAA!



Och, IT'S SO HARD GETTIN' USED TAE CHARLES NAE BEIN' AROUND.

HE'S BEEN SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART O' MUH LIFE F'R YEARS NOW...

WE'VE SHARED SUCH A SPECIAL BOND AS BEST FRIENDS --

-- EVEN THE BEST FRIENDS WIT' BENEFITS F'R A SPELL --

-- THAT I CANNAE IMAGINE LIFE WIT'OUT HIM.

BUT SINCE THERE'S NO TELLIN' WHEN HE'S GOIN' TAE BE GETTIN' HIS FREEDOM --

-- I'M AFRAID I'M GOIN' TAE HAVE TAE GET USED TAE IT --

-- AS WELL AS MUH RECENT INFECTION --



"-- ALONE."

DON'T
SWEAT IT,
PRYDE --

-- THAT
SWILL MCTAGGERT
CALLS "COFFEE" OUGHTA
KEEP HER INNARDS
TOASTY UNTIL NEXT
WINTER!

WHY AM I
NOT SURPRISED
YOU DON'T FIND
THIS WEIRD?

MOIRA'S BEEN SITTING
OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF
A BLIZZARD FOR
DAYS!

GUESS
SHE JUST
FANCIES
THE VIEW
FROM THAT
BALCONY.

MAYBE, BUT THAT'S
NO ORDINARY
BALCONY -- THAT'S
HER SON KEVIN'S
ROOM.

SHE ONCE TOLD ME HOW
BEFORE HE DIED, THE
TWO OF THEM WOULD
SIT UP THERE FOR
HOURS --

-- WAITING
FOR THE SUPPLY
BARGES BRINGING
THE RESOURCES TO
TREAT KEVIN'S
MUTATIONS.

AND IN
ALL THE TIME
I'VE KNOWN HER --
MOIRA HAS NEVER
GONE UP THERE
SINCE...

LOOKS T'ME LIKE
SHE'S WAITING F'R
HER OWN SHIP TO
DOCK.

MCTAGGERT
MAY BE A SHREW --
BUT NO ONE DESERVES
T'SUFFER LIKE
HER.

WHY,
PETE WISDOM --
I DO BELIEVE A
SENTIMENTAL BONE
DOTH GROW IN
YOUR BODY AT
LAST!

HATE TO
INTERUPT YOUR
TENDER MOMENT
LIKE THIS, KIDS --
BUT WE'VE GOT A
CRISIS ON OUR
HANDS.

NICE
MOVE, WAGNER --
Y'AVE MADE KITTY
INTANGIBLE
AGAIN!

EXCEPT FOR CAPTAIN
BRITAIN AND
MEGAN -- WHO'RE
OFF TO LONDON ON
A "PERSONAL
ERRAND" --

-- EVERY-
ONE'S LOADED
UP INTO THE RUNNER
AND READY TO
GO!

"GO?"
GO WHERE?

AUSTRALIA.



WITHIN FIVE MINUTES, THE REMAINDER OF EXCALIBUR IS ASSEMBLED IN THE HANGAR BAY.

TWO MINUTES LATER, THEY'RE AIRBORNE IN THE TEAM'S HYPER-SONIC TRANSPORT ...

... THE "MIDNIGHT RUNNER".

"... BUT IT LOOKS LIKE RAHNE'S A READY 'POINT-PERSON' ON THIS ONE..."

PIOTR --
YE SHOULD BE BUCKLED IN, LAD.

KITTY MAY BE A WHIZ WIT! COMPUTERS --

-- BUT I STILL DINNAE TRUST HER PILOTIN' SKILLS!

KATYA IS A FINE PILOT, RAHNE -- SHE WILL GET US THERE SAFELY.

ARE YE SUUUURE ABOUT THAT? 'CUZ FROM THE LOOK O' YE --

-- AND THE FACT THAT YE HAVE YET THE COME OUT OF YUR ORGANIC STEEL FORM --

I WANT YOU BOTH TO KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON PIOTR. I KNOW IT'S BEEN A WHILE --

-- BUT I'M CONCERNED ABOUT HOW HE'S GOING TO REACT TO BEING "DOWN UNDER" AGAIN.

GOTCHA, BOSS --



-- I'D SAY YE'RE JUST THE LEAST BIT NERVOUS 'BOUT SOME-THIN' --



SNIFF!

NAE TAE
MENTION THE
FACT THAT MUH
WOLF-LIKE SENSES
CAN SMELL THE
TENSION ON
YE...

TELL
ME WHAT'S
WRONG, PIOTR --
I'LL NAE
BITE!

AND IF
YE REVERT TAE
YUIR HUMAN
FORM --

--SO
WILL I.

SEEF

Och,
THE POOR
LAD!

EVEN
AFTER ALL
THE GOOD HE'S
BEEN THROUGH SINCE
JOININ' THE TEAM,
HE'S STILL SO
GUARDED.

IT'S LIKE
HE TRUSTS
NAE ONE --
ESPECIALLY
HIMSELF.

BECAUSE
OF THE BRASH,
CHILDISH
DECISIONS
I ONCE
MADE --

-- I KNEW
MY PATH WOULD
SOMEDAY CROSS
THAT OF MY FORMER
COMRADES -- THE
ACOLYTES.



I JUST DID
NOT EXPECT
IT TO BE SO
SOON.

WELL
AT LEAST
YE WON'T HAVE
TAE FACE THOSE
SPALEENS BY
YUIR LONE-
SOME!

I'LL
PROTECT
YE FROM THOSE
SMARMY
SLAGS.

HA HA/
SPACEBO,
RAHNE.



LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER THE RUNNER TOUCHES DOWN IN THE BARREN REGION OF AUSTRALIA KNOWN AS "THE OUTBACK".

THE TERRAIN IS DESOLATE... THE CLIMATE INHOSPITABLE.

YET DESPITE THE HARSH CONDITIONS OF THIS ARID PLAIN, FOR COLOSSUS...

... THIS IS INDEED A STRANGE KIND OF HOMECOMING.

SIT TIGHT, MEINE FREUNDE.

... THE SLIGHTEST MISSTEP COULD TURN THIS ENTIRE MISSION...

—CUEEEAAAR!

PIOTR -- WASP

I'M GOING TO RECONNOITER AHEAD TO MAKE SURE THE COAST IS --

FOR HIS TERMNATES, HOWEVER...

... INTO A FUNERAL!

MY APOLOGIES, TOVARISCH -- BUT I SHOULD HAVE WARNED YOU SOONER...

... THE AREA SURROUNDING THE X-MEN'S FORMER BASE IS RIDDLED WITH HYPER-SENSITIVE LAND MINES.

LIEBER GOTT, MAN -- THAT'S NOT THE KIND OF DETAIL ONE FORGETS!



NO SWEAT, KIDS -- I'LL JUST USE MY PATENTED "WALKING-ON-AIR" TRICK!

I CAN DEACTIVATE THE MINES ONCE I'M INSIDE.

OR, I CAN PHASE THROUGH 'EM AND DISRUPT THE ARMING MECHANISMS...

NOT THESE MINES, KATYA.

THEY WERE PROGRAMMED TO BE MUTANT SIGNATURE SENSITIVE.

ANY PERSON WHOSE GENETIC SCAN DOES NOT CHECK OUT WILL IMMEDIATELY DETONATE THEM.

AND AT THE TIME THIS FIELD WAS LAID, WE HAD NEITHER YOURS NOR KURT'S DATA.



BUT YOU DO REMEMBER WHERE THEY ARE, RIGHT?

MMMM...
... NYET.



SOMETHIN' TELLS ME PIOTR DID NAE TELL US THESE THINGS BEFORE WE LEFT SCOTLAND ON PURPOSE.

BUT WHY?

THEN HOW IN THE WORLD ARE WE GOIN' TAE GET ACROSS?



I WILL GO.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

AS THEIR FRIEND
DASHES HEAD-
LONG ACROSS THE
MINE FIELD, BOTH
NIGHTCRAWLER
AND SHADOWCAT
SHARE A SUDDEN
REALIZATION.

"THIS," THEY
THINK, "IS WHY
PIOTR BECAME
THE PERSON
HE IS NOW."

"THIS IS WHY
HE MADE THE
CHOICES HE
DID."

AND AS THE MINES EXPLODE
BENEATH HIM -- SCALDING HIS
ARMORED FEET, SEEKING TO
DETER HIM FROM COMPLETING
THIS CRUCIAL TASK --

-- YET FAILING WITH
EACH AND EVERY
DETONATION --

-- COLOSSUS COMES
ONE STEP CLOSER
TO EXORCISING HIS
INNER SHAME.

FOR MUCH LIKE HE
AND HIS FELLOWS
HAD TO ADAPT TO
LIFE WITHIN THIS
LIFELESS LAND...

... SO MUST HE NOW
LEARN TO ADAPT TO
LIFE BEYOND IT.



COME,
MY FRIENDS -- I
HAVE FOUND THE
HATCH TO THE
BUNKER!

MEGA
MAD PROPS
T'YOU,
PIOTR!

LEVEL
WITH ME,
PRYDE...

...WERE YOU ACTUALLY
IN LOVE WITH THAT
PSYCHOP?

JUST
STARTING
TO SEE A
PATTERN,
ARE YA..?

I'LL
SAY!

WE MUST
BE CAUTIOUS,
COMRADES.

THE
ACOLYTES
HAVE EVER BEEN A
DUPlicitous
LOT.

BUT WHAT
OF YOU, PIOTR
RASPUTIN?

DO
YOU WEAR
TWO FACES
AS WELL?

HAVE YOU
TRULY MOVED
ON FROM THE
LIFE YOU ONCE
LED..?

AND AS COLOSSUS
DESCENDS TOWARD
HIS MEETING WITH
DESTINY...

PIOTR!

GET
THAT HATCH
OPEN A.S.A.P.,
EXCALIBUR!

I'M
GOING
IN!

BAM!

BUT AS NIGHT-
CRAWLER BRAVES
THE UNKNOWN TO
SAVE HIS FRIEND...

... THE "UNKNOWN"
DISCOURAGES HIS
RESCUE ATTEMPT...

VEHARCH!

... RATHER
VENEMENTLY!

ELECTRO-
STATIC FIELD...
BLOCKING MY
PORT!

LATER, AFTER
LOCATING AN
UNGUARDED
ENTRANCE...

KURT,
ARE YE STILL
HURTIN'?

JA, RAINE --
MY PRIDE WAS
BRUISED
MOST.

WE'VE
GOTTA GET
DOWN THERE
SOMEHOW!

GIVE
IT A REST,
LUV.

WHOEVER
TRAPPED
"COMRADE
METALHEAD"
DOWN
THERE --

-- IT'S
OBVIOUS THIS
IS SOMETHING
HE'S GONNA
HAVE T'FACE
ALONE...

FELOW...

RELEASE
ME FROM
THIS FORCE
FIELD!

DO
NOT GIVE
ME CAUSE
TO MARCH
YOU!

DROP
THE "TOUGH GUY"
ROUTINE, PETEY
PUREHEART...

WE
KNOW YOU
WOULDN'T
HURT A
FLY --

-- LET ALONE
YOUR FORMER
ALLIES!

-- SCANNER
AND
UNUSCIONE!

BOZHE
MOI! IT IS
THEM --

AVALLON
RISES AGAIN,
X-MAN!

AND
IF YOU ARE
WISE --

-- YOU'LL
REJOIN US
IN FULFILLING
MUTANTKIND'S
DESTINY!



AND IF I
DON'T, WHAT
THEN?

WILL YOU
USE YOUR **ENERGY
EXOSKELETON** TO
CRUSH ME? I THINK
NOT.

REVERT TO
HUMAN -- AND
I'LL LET YOU
GO, **FAIRP**



FAIR.

THOUGH
I AM NEAR-
INVULNERABLE WHEN
TRANSFORMED --

-- I AM AS
SUSCEPTIBLE TO
INJURY AS ANY
MAN WITHOUT MY
ARMOR.

NONETHELESS,
I SUSPECT THIS
PARTICULAR CONFLICT
REQUIRES MUCH MORE
THAN **BRUTE
FORCE...**



YOU'RE A
LOT BRAVER THAN
I GUESSED -- LETTING
YOUR GUARD DOWN
LIKE THAT
RASPUTIN.

YOU DID
NOT COME ALL
THIS WAY TO
TEST MY METTLE,
UNUSCIONE...

TRUE --
WE WANT YOU
BACK WHERE YOU
BELONG, AT
AVALON, WITH
US.

IT WAS
CARGILL'S
IDEAL.
SHE
RESPECTS
YOU FOR THE
INDIVIDUALITY YOU
DISPLAYED WHEN
YOU WERE ONE
OF US.



AND NOW
THAT YOU'RE BACK,
PIOTR --

-- WE CAN
ALL CONTRIBUTE
SOMETHING TO **EXODUS'S
NEW AVALON --**

-- AND
MAKE TOMORROW
A BETTER DAY FOR OUR
MUTANT BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

SCANNER --
ARE YOU CERTAIN
YOU HAVE MADE
THE RIGHT
DECISION?

BUT OF
COURSE I AM,
PIOTR. WE ALL
ARE!

THAT'S
NOT A BAD
THING -- IS
IT?

LISTEN
TO ME VERY
CAREFULLY,
LITTLE
ONE...

...OF
LATE, I
HAVE SOUGHT
ANSWERS TO
THE DOUBTS
THAT LINGER
WITHIN
ME.

LIKE YOU, I ONCE BELIEVED
I COULD MAKE A GREATER
DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD
BY FOLLOWING SOMEONE
ELSE'S EXAMPLE --

-- INSTEAD OF
LEADING BY
MY OWN.

NEVER-
MORE SHALL
I LIVE LIKE THAT.
AND NEITHER
SHOULD
YOU...

WE
ACOLYTES
UNDERSTAND OUR
PLACE IN THE
BIGGER PICTURE,
COLOSSUS!

COME ON,
SCANNER --
THIS WAS
POINTLESS!

I... I
UNUSCIONE,
WHAT SHOULD
I DO?

ONLY
YOU CAN
DECIDE THAT
FOR YOURSELF.
THIS...

... STAND
WITH A MAD-
MAN LIKE
EXODUS --

-- AND
YOURS SHALL
BE A DESTINY
FRAUGHT WITH
DISASTER.



ABOVE...

SHOOOSH

FALL
BACK,
EVERYONE ---
SCHNELL!

WHAM

YOU
TALK
TO
ME

PIOTR!

WHAT
THE HECK
HAPPENED DOWN
THERE?

I—I
WOULD RATHER
NOT TALK ABOUT
IT RIGHT NOW,
KATYA.

O-KARRRY...

AND AS COLOSSUS PONDERES
THE FUTURE OF THE YOUNG GIRL
WHO REMINDS HIM OF HIMSELF
IN SO MANY WAYS...

... SO DOES ONE OF HIS TEAMMATES DRAW
A MOST UNLIKELY CONNECTION TO HIM.



THE MISSION COMPLETE,
EXCALIBUR RETURNS TO
THEIR MUIR ISLAND BASE.

AND THOUGH THERE
WERE NO PHYSICAL
CASUALTIES TO SPEAK
OF THIS TIME...



... STILL PIOTR RASPUTIN
REMAINS TROUBLED.

IF ONLY
THEY WOULD HAVE
LISTENED TO
ME...

TOUGH AS
IT IS GETTIN'
OTHER PEOPLE
T'SEE THEIR
MISTAKES.
BIG GUY --

-- IT'S A HECKVA
LOT TOUGHER FACIN'
YER OWN.

I KNOW
MY CHOICES
HAVE CAUSED TOO
MANY PEOPLE TOO
MUCH PAIN
ALREADY.

I REFUSE
TO LET THE
DECISIONS I
MAKE CAUSE
ANY MORE.

THE WAY I SEE IT --
AN' I'M NO EXPERT,
MIND YA...

IF AN
OBSTINATE
UKRAINIAN OX LIKE
YERSELF CAN ADMIT THE
ERROR O' HIS WAYS
AND LEARN FROM
THEM --

-- THEN I'D
SAY THERE'S
HOPE FOR
ANYONE!

PERHAPS
YOU ARE RIGHT,
WISDOM.

I
ONLY PRAY
THAT IT WILL BE
NEITHER TOO
LITTLE --

-- NOR
TOO
LATE...

A NEW BEGINNING FOR EXCALIBUR!
PLUS: THE ARRIVAL OF NEW PENCILER
SALVADOR LARROCA!



SWORD STROKES

EXCALIBUR #103

Alo! We'll keep the chitchat to a minimum. As you've no doubt noticed, this page is just 'littered' with art from our next issue by the new team of Salvador Larroca and Scott Koblish (with coloring by the affable Paul Becton)! Soak it in, get excited, and be ready, 'cause on January 15th, the new era begins!

Dear *Swordstrokes*,
RE: EXCALIBUR #103.
First off, I was pleased to see Kurt, Kitty and Piotr team up in this issue. I grew up reading UNCANNY X-MEN in the '80s, so this was old home week for me. I'd like to see more stories bringing these three together.

By the way, the last time I checked, Kitty Pryde was still a teenager. Just what is the age difference between her and Pete Wisdom? I mean, it was such a big thing when she fell for Piotr Rasputin. But Pete seems way older than either of them.

Will we see any stories spotlighting Kurt Wagner in the near future? I'm curious as to how he feels about Mystique now that he knows they may be mother and son. I haven't seen that subject touched upon lately. Also, Kurt was always pretty tight with Wolverine. Is he even aware of the problems Logan has had with his feral side recently? Does he ever get together with his former teammates?

Finally, please flesh out Brian and Meggan a bit. I love both characters, but know little about what makes them tick.

That's all for now. Thanks for listening.

Angie Saunders
Crestline, OH

Thanks for writing in, Angie! As always, it was fun seeing Piotr, Kitty and Kurt as a unit again, and the strong friendship and sense of history that they share will always be a part of EXCALIBUR. Upcoming

events are going to keep this trio from hanging out much, however, as you'll see in the months to come. Nightcrawler himself will indeed be spotlighted in his own tale next year, in which he must return to Germany in order to... but that would be telling.

The relationship between Kitty and Pete has generated more mail, both positive and negative, than any other aspect of this book so far. Some people love their unique dynamic, while others decry the apparent discrepancy between their respective ages. Yes, Pete is slightly older than Colossus, but we think Pryde and Wisdom are perfectly suited to each other. Of course, every relationship has its ups and downs...

Dear Warren and Terry,
I don't often write in to comic books, and then usually just to goad creators to "do better." But even before I opened PRYDE & WISDOM, one look at the stunning cover told me that I would have very little to complain about. Little did I suspect how totally awed I would be!

A confession first: Kitty Pryde has been my absolute favorite character in the entire Marvel line, ever since she was a gawky fourteen-year-old hero, all eyes and legs, who wasn't allowed to save the universe because she had a bad cold. I could cheerfully read 36 pages of Kitty painting her toenails, so when the limited series was first announced, I knew that I would buy it; I just wasn't hoping for much. Pete Wisdom has never thrilled me as a character—when he first appeared, I thought he was just another John Constantine rip-off—but I must admit, he has improved upon acquaintance. In just one panel on page 2, I was finally sold on their relationship; not just the amusing sniping between the two, but the easy affection that was so evident in their very body language—I have never seen Kitty so adult, so carefree, so much herself.

And then the story kicked

in! What a thrill-a-minute, action-packed ride it was! (I hate clichés, but what else can I use?) And the art! It suited the story perfectly, flowing fluidly from panel to panel, with not a single gesture wasted. And the marvelous inking and coloring, the rich use of golds and blues and especially the blocks of darkness to express the mood! And the writing, the exquisite balance of humor and horror! The minutely delineated secondary characters, especially the wackos at Dept. F66!

I am on tenterhooks. I don't know how I can wait another thirty days for the next installment. Thank you, thank you, everyone, for a job perfectly done.

Wait, I just thought of one complaint: *where's Lockheed??*

Lesley Kniernier
West Babylon, NY

Glad we were able to snare you with the first issue, Lesley! As you know by now, the subsequent two issues of PRYDE & WISDOM were no less intensive, and we're all very proud of how the series turned out! Sequel, anyone?

And by the way, Lockheed was back at Muir Island during this story, no doubt scheming new ways to infuriate Wisdom!

Dear *Swordstrokes*,
Alyson Dewsnap (#103) is correct that Meggan is not a mutant, and neither is Brian for that matter. Does Marvel Comics now have a mutant-only policy for its X-titles? If you want to kill off Meggan and Brian, do so, but do not expect us to believe they are now mutants.

I loved PRYDE & WISDOM, except for the fact it was too short by one issue for the storyline. Why not make it a continuing title, an X-Men version of *The X-Files*? I'd bet Kitty Pryde's fans alone can provide a solid base readership. As per their relationship, I think it is great. Kitty and Pete seem natural together. Kitty and Colossus as a couple would seem unnatural; they have completely different ways of viewing the world; if he is a slow-witted poet, she is a sharp-witted Philistine.

The main reasons EXCALIBUR is my favorite comic is that you blend mutants and

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non-mutants together (repeat, Brian and Meegan) and you don't have many mutant massacre storylines. I am tired of Bastion, Creed, Onslaught, Sinister, Apocalypse, etc. and their "destroy all mutants" storylines. How about more super-powered criminals? They can be greedy and deadly, but not would-be conquerors. Perhaps it is time for a new incarnation of Zodiac?

Tony Wentworth
Farmington Hills, MI

Tony, Tony, Tony! We have absolutely no "mutants only" policy in EXCALIBUR!—If you have the ability and believe in The Dream of Xavier, you can be a member! The feeling of family holds this team together through thick and thin, not the genetic makeup of the individual members. In fact, Brian's very non-mutant origin and background is going to play a key role in our first story-arc of next year.

As for the villains, look far beyond the faces you're expecting to see. Why, we've got some new folks showing up next month to cause some major-league trouble, and that's just for starters! (By the way, there is a new Zodiac out there. They premiered in CAPTAIN AMERICA #449. Does anyone out there want Zodiac to appear in EXCALIBUR? Write in and let us know!)



NEXT MONTH

**ENTER:
SALVADOR
LARROCA and
SCOTT KOBLISH!**